

Santa Barbara Public Library System

Book Club in a Bag Kits

Fiction Selections

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (1993) 197 p.

Santiago, a shepherd boy, journeys from Spain to Morocco in search of worldly success, and eventually to Egypt, where a fateful encounter with an alchemist brings him at last to self-understanding and spiritual enlightenment. The story has the comic charm, dramatic tension and psychological intensity of a fairy tale, but it's full of specific wisdom as well, about becoming self-empowered, overcoming depression, and believing in dreams.

The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein (2008) 321 p.

Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television extensively, and by listening very closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver. Through Denny, Enzo has gained tremendous insight into the human condition, and he sees that life, like racing, isn't simply about going fast. Using the techniques needed on the race track, one can successfully navigate all of life's ordeals. On the eve of his death, Enzo takes stock of his life. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations, Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family, holding in his heart the dream that Denny will become a racing champion with daughter Zoë at his side. Having learned what it takes to be a compassionate and successful person, the wise canine can barely wait until his next lifetime, when he is sure he will return as a man.

The Barbarian Nurseries by Héctor Tobar (2011) 421 p.

Scott and Maureen Torres-Thompson have always relied on others to run their Orange County home. But when bad investments crater their bank account, it all comes down to Araceli: their somewhat prickly Mexican maid. One night, an argument between the couple turns physical, and a misunderstanding leaves the children in Araceli's care. Their parents unreachable, she takes them to central Los Angeles in the hopes of finding Scott's estranged Mexican father---an earnest quest that soon becomes a colossal misadventure, with consequences that ripple through every strata of the sprawling city. Héctor Tobar's *The Barbarian Nurseries* is a masterful tale of contemporary Los Angeles, a novel as alive as the city itself.

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk by Ben Fountain (2012) 307 p.

A ferocious firefight with Iraqi insurgents at "the battle of Al-Ansakar Canal"—three minutes and forty-three seconds of intense warfare caught on tape by an embedded Fox News

crew—has transformed the eight surviving men of Bravo Squad into America's most sought-after heroes. For the past two weeks, the Bush administration has sent them on a media-intensive nationwide *Victory Tour* to reinvigorate public support for the war. Now, on this chilly and rainy Thanksgiving, the Bravos are guests of America's Team, the Dallas Cowboys, slated to be part of the halftime show alongside the superstar pop group Destiny's Child. Over the course of this day, Billy will begin to understand difficult truths about himself, his country, his struggling family, and his brothers-in-arms—soldiers both dead and alive. In the final few hours before returning to Iraq, Billy will drink and brawl, yearn for home and mourn those missing, face a heart-wrenching decision, and discover pure love and a bitter wisdom far beyond his years. Poignant, riotously funny, and exquisitely heartbreaking, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* is a devastating portrait of our time

Caleb's Crossing by Geraldine Brooks (2011) 336 p.

Bethia Mayfield is a restless and curious young woman growing up in Martha's vineyard in the 1660s amid a small band of pioneering English Puritans. At age twelve, she meets Caleb, the young son of a chieftain, and the two forge a secret bond that draws each into the alien world of the other. Bethia's father is a Calvinist minister who seeks to convert the native Wampanoag, and Caleb becomes a prize in the contest between old ways and new, eventually becoming the first Native American graduate of Harvard College. Inspired by a true story and narrated by the irresistible Bethia, *Caleb's Crossing* brilliantly captures the triumphs and turmoil of two brave, openhearted spirits who risk everything in a search for knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance.

Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese (2009) 688 p.

Marion and Shiva Stone are twin brothers born of a secret union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa. Orphaned by their mother's death in childbirth and their father's disappearance, bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution. Yet it is their passion for the same woman that will tear them apart and force Marion, fresh out of medical school, to flee his homeland. He makes his way to America, finding refuge in his work as an intern at an underfunded, overcrowded New York City hospital. When the past nearly destroys him, Marion must entrust his life to the two men he thought he trusted least in the world: the father who abandoned him and the brother who betrayed him.

Euphoria by Lily King (2014) 257 p.

English anthropologist Andrew Bankson has been alone in the field for several years, studying the Kiona river tribe in the Territory of New Guinea. Haunted by the memory of his brothers' deaths and increasingly frustrated and isolated by his research, Bankson is on the verge of suicide when a chance encounter with colleagues, the controversial Nell Stone and her wry and mercurial Australian husband Fen, pulls him back from the brink. Nell and Fen have just fled the bloodthirsty Mumbanyo and, in spite of Nell's poor health, are hungry for a new discovery. When Bankson finds them a new tribe nearby, the artistic, female-dominated Tam, he ignites an intellectual and romantic firestorm between the three of them that burns out of anyone's control. Set between two World Wars and inspired by events in the life of revolutionary anthropologist Margaret Mead, *Euphoria* is an enthralling story of passion, possession, exploration, and sacrifice from accomplished author Lily King.

The Girl You Left Behind by Jojo Moyes (2013) 464 p.

Paris, 1916. Sophie Lefèvre must keep her family safe while her adored husband, Édouard, fights at the front. When their town falls to the Germans in the midst of World War I, Sophie is forced to serve them every evening at her hotel. From the moment the new Kommandant sets eyes on Sophie's portrait—painted by her artist husband—a dangerous obsession is born, one that will lead Sophie to make a dark and terrible decision. Almost a century later, Sophie's portrait hangs in the home of Liv Halston, a wedding gift from her young husband before his sudden death. After a chance encounter reveals the portrait's true worth, a battle begins over its troubled history and Liv's world is turned upside all over again.

The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd (2014) 359 p.

Hetty "Handful" Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke's daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women. Kidd's sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah's eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other's destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

The Language of Flowers by Vanessa Diffenbaugh (2011) 334 p.

The Victorian language of flowers was used to convey romantic expressions: honeysuckle for devotion, asters for patience, and red roses for love. But for Victoria Jones, it's been more useful in communicating grief, mistrust, and solitude. After a childhood spent in the foster-care system, she is unable to get close to anybody, and her only connection to the world is through flowers and their meanings. Now eighteen and emancipated from the system, a mysterious vendor at the flower market has her questioning what's been missing in her life, and when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

The Light Between Oceans by M. L. Stedman (2012) 343 p.

After four harrowing years on the Western Front, Tom Sherbourne returns to Australia and takes a job as the lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock, nearly half a day's journey from the coast. To this isolated island, where the supply boat comes once a season and shore leaves are granted every other year at best, Tom brings a young, bold, and loving wife, Isabel. Years later, after two miscarriages and one stillbirth, the grieving Isabel hears a baby's cries on the wind. A boat has washed up onshore carrying a dead man and a living baby....We are swept into a story about extraordinarily compelling characters seeking to find their North Star in a world where there is no right answer, where justice for one person is another's tragic loss.

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson (2010) 358 p.

Major Ernest Pettigrew (retired) leads a quiet life in the village of St. Mary, England, until his brother's death sparks an unexpected friendship with Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the Pakistani shopkeeper from the village. Drawn together by their shared love of literature and the loss of their respective spouses, the Major and Mrs. Ali soon find their friendship blossoming into something more. But will their relationship survive in a society that considers Ali a foreigner?

The Narrow Road to the Deep North by Richard Flanagan (2014) 397 p.

August, 1943: Australian surgeon Dorrigo Evans is haunted by his affair with his uncle's young wife two years earlier. His life, in a brutal Japanese POW camp on the Thai-Burma Death Railway, is a daily struggle to save the men under his command. Until he receives a letter that will change him forever. A savagely beautiful novel about the many forms of good and evil, of truth and transcendence, as one man comes of age, prospers, only to discover all that he has lost.

Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline (2013) 278 p.

Penobscot Indian Molly Ayer is close to “aging out” out of the foster care system. A community service position helping an elderly woman clean out her home is the only thing keeping Molly out of juvie and worse. As she helps Vivian sort through her possessions and memories, Molly learns that she and Vivian aren’t as different as they seem to be. A young Irish immigrant orphaned in New York City, Vivian was put on a train to the Midwest with hundreds of other children whose destinies would be determined by luck and chance. Molly discovers that she has the power to help Vivian find answers to mysteries that have haunted her for her entire life - answers that will ultimately free them both.

Rich in detail and epic in scope, *Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline is a powerful novel of upheaval and resilience, of unexpected friendship, and of the secrets we carry that keep us from finding out who we are.

Peace Like a River by Leif Enger (2001) 320 p.

The quiet Midwestern life of the Lands is upended when Davy, the oldest son, kills two marauders who have come to harm the family; unlike his father, he is not content to leave all matters of justice in God's hands. The morning of his sentencing, Davy—a hero to some, a cold-blooded murderer to others—escapes from his cell, and the Lands set out in search of him. Their journey is touched by serendipity and the kindness of strangers—among them a free spirit named Roxanna, who offers them a place to stay during a blizzard and winds up providing them with something far more permanent. Meanwhile, a federal agent is trailing the Lands, convinced they know of Davy's whereabouts. With Jeremiah at the helm, the family covers territory far more extraordinary than even the Badlands where they search for Davy from their Airstream trailer. Sprinkled with playful nods to biblical tales, beloved classics such as *Huckleberry Finn*, the adventure stories of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the westerns of Zane Grey, *Peace Like a River* unfolds like a revelation.

The Rosie Project by Graeme Simsion (2013) 320 p.

The art of love is never a science: Meet Don Tillman, a brilliant yet socially inept professor of genetics, who’s decided it’s time he found a wife. In the orderly, evidence-based manner with which Don approaches all things, he designs the Wife Project to find his perfect partner: a sixteen-page, scientifically valid survey to filter out the drinkers, the smokers, the late arrivers. Rosie Jarman possesses all these qualities. Don easily disqualifies her as a candidate for The Wife Project (even if she is “quite intelligent for a barmaid”). But Don is intrigued by Rosie’s own quest to identify her biological father. When an unlikely relationship develops as they collaborate on The Father Project, Don is forced to confront the spontaneous whirlwind that is Rosie—and the realization that, despite your best scientific

efforts, you don't find love, it finds you.

Rules of Civility by Amor Towles (2011) 324 p.

Set in New York City in 1938, *Rules of Civility* tells the story of a watershed year in the life of an uncompromising twenty-five-year-old named Katey Kontent. Armed with little more than a formidable intellect, a bracing wit, and her own brand of cool nerve, Katey embarks on a journey from a Wall Street secretarial pool through the upper echelons of New York society in search of a brighter future.

The story opens on New Year's Eve in a Greenwich Village jazz bar, where Katey and her boardinghouse roommate Eve happen to meet Tinker Grey, a handsome banker with royal blue eyes and a ready smile. This chance encounter and its startling consequences cast Katey off her current course, but end up providing her unexpected access to the rarified offices of Conde Nast and a glittering new social circle. Elegant and captivating, *Rules of Civility* turns a Jamesian eye on how spur of the moment decisions define life for decades to come. A love letter to a great American city at the end of the Depression, readers will quickly fall under its spell of crisp writing, sparkling atmosphere and breathtaking revelations, as Towles evokes the ghosts of Fitzgerald, Capote, and McCarthy.

The Samurai's Garden by Gail Tsukiyama (1994) 211 p.

The daughter of a Chinese mother and a Japanese father, Tsukiyama uses the Japanese invasion of China during the late 1930s as a somber backdrop for her unusual story about a 20-year-old Chinese painter named Stephen who is sent to his family's summer home in a Japanese coastal village to recover from a bout with tuberculosis. Here he is cared for by Matsu, a reticent housekeeper and a master gardener. Over the course of a remarkable year, Stephen learns Matsu's secret and gains not only physical strength, but also profound spiritual insight. Matsu is a samurai of the soul, a man devoted to doing good and finding beauty in a cruel and arbitrary world, and Stephen is a noble student, learning to appreciate Matsu's generous and nurturing way of life and to love Matsu's soulmate, gentle Sachi, a woman afflicted with leprosy.

The Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes (2011) 163 p.

This intense novel follows a middle-aged man as he contends with a past he has never much thought about—until his closest childhood friends return with a vengeance, one of them from the grave, another maddeningly present. Tony Webster thought he'd left all this behind as he built a life for himself, and by now his marriage and family and career have fallen into an amicable divorce and retirement. But he is then presented with a mysterious legacy

that obliges him to reconsider a variety of things he thought he'd understood all along, and to revise his estimation of his own nature and place in the world.

Winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize

The Signature of All Things by Elizabeth Gilbert (2013) 512 p.

Spanning much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novel follows the fortunes of the extraordinary Whittaker family as led by the enterprising Henry Whittaker—a poor-born Englishman who makes a great fortune in the South American quinine trade, eventually becoming the richest man in Philadelphia. Born in 1800, Henry's brilliant daughter, Alma (who inherits both her father's money and his mind), ultimately becomes a botanist of considerable gifts herself. As Alma's research takes her deeper into the mysteries of evolution, she falls in love with a man named Ambrose Pike who makes incomparable paintings of orchids and who draws her in the exact opposite direction—into the realm of the spiritual, the divine, and the magical. Alma is a clear-minded scientist; Ambrose a utopian artist—but what unites this unlikely couple is a desperate need to understand the workings of this world and the mechanisms behind all life.

Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel (2014) 333 p.

An audacious, darkly glittering novel set in the eerie days of civilization's collapse, Station Eleven tells the spellbinding story of a Hollywood star, his would-be savior, and a nomadic group of actors roaming the scattered outposts of the Great Lakes region, risking everything for art and humanity. A novel of art, memory, and ambition, Station Eleven tells a story about the relationships that sustain us, the ephemeral nature of fame, and the beauty of the world as we know it.

The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin (2014) 288 p.

A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. He lives alone, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. But when a mysterious package appears at the bookstore, its unexpected arrival gives Fikry the chance to make his life over—and see everything anew.

A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki (2013) 432 p.

In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided there's only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates' bullying. But before she ends it all, Nao first plans to document the life of her great grandmother, a Buddhist nun who's lived more than a century. A diary is Nao's only solace—and will touch lives in ways she can scarcely imagine.

Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchbox—possibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Nao's drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future.

This Is Where I Leave You by Jonathan Tropper (2009) 339 p.

The death of Judd Foxman's father marks the first time that the entire Foxman family has been together in years. Conspicuously absent: Judd's wife, whose fourteen-month affair has recently become painfully public. Simultaneously mourning the death of his father and the demise of his marriage, Judd joins the rest of the Foxmans as they reluctantly submit to their patriarch's dying request: to spend the seven days following the funeral together. In the same house. Like a family. For Judd, it's a week-long attempt to make sense of the mess his life has become while trying in vain not to get sucked into the regressive battles of his madly dysfunctional family. *This Is Where I Leave You* is a riotously funny, emotionally raw novel about love, marriage, divorce, family, and the ties that bind - whether we like it or not.

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce (2012) 320 p.

Meet Harold Fry, recently retired. He lives in a small English village with his wife, Maureen, who seems irritated by almost everything he does. Little differentiates one day from the next. Then one morning a letter arrives, addressed to Harold in a shaky scrawl, from a woman he hasn't heard from in twenty years. Queenie Hennessy is in hospice and is writing to say goodbye. But before Harold mails off a quick reply, a chance encounter convinces him that he absolutely must deliver his message to Queenie in person. In his yachting shoes and light coat, Harold Fry embarks on an urgent quest. Determined to walk six hundred miles to the hospice, Harold believes that as long as he walks, Queenie will live. A novel of charm, humor, and profound insight into the thoughts and feelings we all bury deep within our hearts, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* introduces Rachel Joyce as a wise—and utterly irresistible—storyteller.

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves by Karen Joy Fowler (2013) 320 p.

The story of an American family, middle class in middle America, ordinary in every way but one. But that exception is the beating heart of this extraordinary novel. Meet the Cooke family: Mother and Dad, brother Lowell, sister Fern, and Rosemary, who begins her story in the middle. She has her reasons. "I was raised with a chimpanzee," she explains. "I tell you Fern was a chimp and already you aren't thinking of her as my sister. But until Fern's expulsion ... she was my twin, my funhouse mirror, my whirlwind other half and I loved her

as a sister.” As a child, Rosemary never stopped talking. Then, something happened, and Rosemary wrapped herself in silence. In *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Karen Joy Fowler weaves her most accomplished work to date—a tale of loving but fallible people whose well-intentioned actions lead to heartbreaking consequences.

Where'd You Go, Bernadette by Maria Semple (2012) 326 p.

Bernadette Fox is notorious. To her Microsoft-guru husband, she's a fearlessly opinionated partner; to fellow private-school mothers in Seattle, she's a disgrace; to design mavens, she's a revolutionary architect, and to 15-year-old Bee, she is a best friend and, simply, Mom. Then Bernadette disappears. It began when Bee aced her report card and claimed her promised reward: a family trip to Antarctica. But Bernadette's intensifying allergy to Seattle--and people in general--has made her so agoraphobic that a virtual assistant in India now runs her most basic errands. A trip to the end of the earth is problematic. To find her mother, Bee compiles email messages, official documents, secret correspondence--creating a compulsively readable and touching novel about misplaced genius and a mother and daughter's role in an absurd world.

The Wonder Bread Summer by Jessica Anya Blau (2013) 288 p.

In *The Wonder Bread Summer*, loosely based on *Alice in Wonderland*, 20-year-old Allie Dodgson has adventures that rival those Alice had down the rabbit hole. Or those of Weeds' Nancy Botwin.

Allison is working at a dress shop to help pay for college. The dress shop turns out to be a front for drug dealers. And Allison ends up on the run—with a Wonder Bread bag full of cocaine. With a hit man after her, Allison wants the help of her parents. But there's a problem: Her mom took off when Allison was eight; her dad moves so often Allison that doesn't even have his phone number....Set in 1980s California, *The Wonder Bread Summer* is a wickedly funny and fresh caper that's sure to please fans of Christopher Moore, Carl Hiaasen, and Marcy Dermansky.

Non-Fiction Selections

At Home: A Short History of Private Life by Bill Bryson (2010) 532 p.

“Houses aren't refuges from history. They are where history ends up.” Bill Bryson and his family live in a Victorian parsonage in a part of England where nothing of any great significance has happened since the Romans decamped. Yet one day, he began to consider how very little he knew about the ordinary things of life as he found it in that comfortable

home. To remedy this, he formed the idea of journeying about his house from room to room to “write a history of the world without leaving home.” The bathroom provides the occasion for a history of hygiene; the bedroom, sex, death, and sleep; the kitchen, nutrition and the spice trade; and so on, as Bryson shows how each has figured in the evolution of private life. Whatever happens in the world, he demonstrates, ends up in our house, in the paint and the pipes and the pillows and every item of furniture. Bill Bryson’s lively, inquisitive mind makes him a master at turning the seemingly isolated or mundane fact into an occasion for the most diverting exposition imaginable. His wit and sheer prose fluency make *At Home* one of the most entertaining books ever written about private life.

Being Mortal by Atul Gawande (2014) 263 p.

Medicine has triumphed in modern times, transforming birth, injury, and infectious disease from harrowing to manageable. But in the inevitable condition of aging and death, the goals of medicine seem too frequently to run counter to the interest of the human spirit. Nursing homes, preoccupied with safety, pin patients into railed beds and wheelchairs. Hospitals isolate the dying, checking for vital signs long after the goals of cure have become moot. Doctors, committed to extending life, continue to carry out devastating procedures that in the end extend suffering. Gawande, a practicing surgeon, addresses his profession’s ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families. Gawande offers examples of freer, more socially fulfilling models for assisting the infirm and dependent elderly, and he explores the varieties of hospice care to demonstrate that a person’s last weeks or months may be rich and dignified. Full of eye-opening research and riveting storytelling, *Being Mortal* asserts that medicine can comfort and enhance our experience even to the end, providing not only a good life but also a good end.

The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America by Timothy Egan (2009) 283 p.

On the afternoon of August 20, 1910, a battering ram of wind moved through the drought-stricken national forests of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, whipping the hundreds of small blazes burning across the forest floor into a roaring inferno. Forest rangers had assembled nearly ten thousand men—college boys, day workers, immigrants from mining camps—to fight the fire. But no living person had seen anything like those flames, and neither the rangers nor anyone else knew how to subdue them.

Egan narrates the struggles of the overmatched rangers against the implacable fire with unstoppable dramatic force. Equally dramatic is the larger story he tells of outsized president Teddy Roosevelt and his chief forester, Gifford Pinchot. Pioneering the notion of conservation, Roosevelt and Pinchot did nothing less than create the idea of public land as

our national treasure, owned by and preserved for every citizen. *Santa Barbara Reads 2014 selection*

Book of Ages: The Life & Opinions of Jane Franklin by Jill Lepore (2013) 267 p.

A revelatory portrait of Benjamin Franklin's youngest sister and a history of history itself. Like her brother, Jane Franklin was a passionate reader, a gifted writer, and an astonishingly shrewd political commentator. Unlike him, she was a mother of twelve. Benjamin Franklin, who wrote more letters to his sister than he wrote to anyone else, was the original American self-made man; his sister spent her life caring for her children. They left very different traces behind. Making use of an amazing cache of little-studied material, including documents, objects, and portraits only just discovered, Jill Lepore brings Jane Franklin to life in a way that illuminates not only this one woman but an entire world—a world usually lost to history.

The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Olympic Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics by Daniel James Brown (2013) 416 p.

It was an unlikely quest from the start. With a team composed of the sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers, the University of Washington's eight-oar crew team was never expected to defeat the elite teams of the East Coast and Great Britain, yet they did, going on to shock the world by defeating the German team rowing for Adolf Hitler. The emotional heart of the tale lies with Joe Rantz, a teenager without family or prospects, who rows not only to regain his shattered self-regard but also to find a real place for himself in the world. Drawing on the boys' own journals and vivid memories of a once-in-a-lifetime shared dream, Brown has created an unforgettable portrait of an era, a celebration of a remarkable achievement, and a chronicle of one extraordinary young man's personal quest.

Empty Mansions by Bill Dedman & Paul Clark Newell, Jr. (2013) 470 p.

A rich mystery of wealth and loss, connecting the Gilded Age opulence of the nineteenth century with a twenty-first-century battle over a \$300 million inheritance. At its heart is a reclusive heiress named Huguette Clark, a woman so secretive that, at the time of her death at age 104, no new photograph of her had been seen in decades. Though she owned palatial homes in California, New York, and Connecticut, why had she lived for twenty years in a simple hospital room, despite being in excellent health? Why were her valuables being sold off? Was she in control of her fortune, or controlled by those managing her money? Richly illustrated with more than seventy photographs, *Empty Mansions* is an enthralling story of an eccentric of the highest order, a last jewel of the Gilded Age who lived life on her own terms.

Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario (2007) 291 p.

Based on the Los Angeles Times series that won two Pulitzer Prizes, this is a timeless story of families torn apart. When Enrique was five, his mother, too poor to feed her children, left Honduras to work in the United States. The move allowed her to send money back home so Enrique could eat better and go to school past the third grade. She promised she would return quickly, but she struggled in America. Without her, he became lonely and troubled. After eleven years, he decided he would go find her. He set off alone, with little more than a slip of paper bearing his mother's North Carolina telephone number. Without money, he made the dangerous trek up the length of Mexico, clinging to the sides and tops of freight trains. He and other migrants, many of them children, are hunted like animals. To evade bandits and authorities, they must jump onto and off the moving boxcars they call the Train of Death. It is an epic journey, one thousands of children make each year to find their mothers in the United States. - *Santa Barbara Reads 2010 Selection*

Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief by Lawrence Wright (2013) 453p.

Scientology presents itself as a scientific approach to spiritual enlightenment, but its practices have long been shrouded in mystery. Now Lawrence Wright—armed with his investigative talents, years of archival research, and more than two hundred personal interviews with current and former Scientologists—uncovers the inner workings of the church. We meet founder L. Ron Hubbard, the highly imaginative but mentally troubled science-fiction writer, and his tough, driven successor, David Miscavige. We go inside their specialized cosmology and language. We learn about the church's legal attacks on the IRS, its vindictive treatment of critics, and its phenomenal wealth. We see the church court celebrities such as Tom Cruise while consigning its clergy to hard labor under billion-year contracts. Through it all, Wright asks what fundamentally comprises a religion, and if Scientology in fact merits this Constitutionally-protected label. Brilliantly researched, compellingly written, *Going Clear* pulls back the curtain on one of the most secretive organizations at work today.

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson (2014) 368 p.

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan

into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever. *Just Mercy* is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

Orange is the New Black by Piper Kerman (2010) 295 p.

With a career, a boyfriend, and a loving family, Piper Kerman barely resembles the reckless young woman who delivered a suitcase of drug money ten years before. But that past has caught up with her. Convicted and sentenced to fifteen months at the infamous federal correctional facility in Danbury, Connecticut, the well-heeled Smith College alumna is now inmate #11187-424—one of the millions of people who disappear “down the rabbit hole” of the American penal system. From her first strip search to her final release, Kerman learns to navigate this strange world with its strictly enforced codes of behavior and arbitrary rules. She meets women from all walks of life, who surprise her with small tokens of generosity, hard words of wisdom, and simple acts of acceptance. Heartbreaking, hilarious, and at times enraging, Kerman's story offers a rare look into the lives of women in prison—why it is we lock so many away and what happens to them when they're there. *Santa Barbara Reads 2015 Selection*

The Zookeeper's Wife by Diane Ackerman (2007) 323 p.

When Germany invaded Poland, Stuka bombers devastated Warsaw—and the city's zoo along with it. With most of their animals dead, zookeepers Jan and Antonina Zabinski began smuggling Jews into empty cages. Another dozen "guests" hid inside the Zabinskis' villa, emerging after dark for dinner, socializing, and, during rare moments of calm, piano concerts. Jan, active in the Polish resistance, kept ammunition buried in the elephant enclosure and stashed explosives in the animal hospital. Meanwhile, Antonina kept her unusual household afloat, caring for both its human and its animal inhabitants—otters, a badger, hyena pups, lynxes. With her exuberant prose and exquisite sensitivity to the natural world, Diane Ackerman engages us viscerally in the lives of the zoo animals, their keepers, and their hidden visitors. She shows us how Antonina refused to give in to the penetrating fear of discovery, keeping alive an atmosphere of play and innocence even as Europe crumbled around her.

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